

# Army steps in to help with housing rush at Grafenwöhr

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GRAFENWÖHR, Germany — The Army is coming to the rescue after a company commander's efforts to help his soldiers beat a housing rush in Grafenwöhr left 22 families holding lease agreements for apartments that they weren't allowed to live in.

The mix-up occurred after soldiers from the Kitzingen-based 12th Chemical Company were told to look for apartments in Grafenwöhr before some 3,200 soldiers from the 2nd Cavalry (Stryker) Regiment arrived in the area. The first of those Stryker soldiers and their families stepped off the bus in Vilseck on Wednesday.

Because the 12th Chemical Company commander had such a small unit, he was trying to be proactive and help families move to Grafenwöhr early and to coordinate with housing, said Command Sgt. Maj. Hector Marin of the 4th Brigade, 1st Infantry Division.

"They are trying to get down there before the massive rush ...," Marin said. "The chain of command was trying to do the right thing."

signed leases had orders to move — meaning the Army wouldn't pay for the lease or for the soldiers' moving expenses.

"No soldier can move without orders, and that commander did not order any soldier or family to move without a set of orders," Marin said. "What the commander didn't anticipate was that soldiers would go down there and sign up for private rentals off base and get themselves into a contract," he said.

Bilyana Atova, the wife of one of the 12th Chemical soldiers, said in an e-mail that the move had not gone smoothly.

"As a new member of the Army community, I have always thought that moving in the Army is strict in regards to the regulations and predictable, where everyone knows the plan and does not expect surprises," she wrote. "... but not this time."

For soldiers with private rental agreements the move was a pain in the neck, Atova wrote. She and her husband had been forced to rent an apartment in Grafenwöhr without orders, then faced moving at their own expense to avoid paying two rents.

"And then, you are told you will not move until you get your orders. So, after everything is done and said, the last couple of months have made no sense," she wrote.

Soldiers either had packed boxes in the middle of their old apartments, or they paid to move themselves, she wrote.

Marin said the orders allowing the soldiers to move were delayed until two to three weeks ago because of funding issues. But, Army housing officials have negotiated with German landlords so that none of the families would have to pay rent for the apartments while they were not living in them. In addition, the Army is covering the moving costs of the 12th Chemical Company soldiers.

As of Monday, about 96 percent of the soldiers had received orders, Marin said.